

Religious Change and the Self in Muslim South Asia since 1800

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In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries South Asian Muslims, along with Muslims elsewhere in the world, began to experience religious change of revolutionary significance. This change involved a shift in the focus of Muslim piety from the next world to this one. It meant the devaluing of a faith of contemplation on God's mysteries and of belief in His capacity to intercede for men on earth. It meant the valuing instead of a faith in which Muslims were increasingly aware that it was they, and only they, who could act to create a just society on earth. The balance which had long existed between the other-worldly and the this-worldly aspects of Islam was moved firmly in favour of the latter.

This process of change has had many expressions: the movements of the Mujahidin, the Faraizis, Deoband, the Ahl-i Hadiths and Aligarh in the nineteenth century; and those of the Nadwat ul Ulama, the Tablighi Jamaat, the Jamaat-i Islami and the Muslim modernists in the twentieth. It has also been expressed in many subtle shifts in behaviour at saints' shrines and in the pious practice of many Muslims. Associated with this process of change was a shift in traditional Islamic knowledge away from the rational towards the revealed sciences, and a more general shift in the sources of inspiration away from the Iranian lands towards the Arab lands. There was also the adoption of print and the translations of authoritative texts into Indian languages with all their subsequent ramifications - among them the emergence of

a reflective reading of the scriptures and the development of an increasingly rich inner landscape. Operating at the heart of this process was the increasing assumption by individual Muslims of responsibility for creating Muslim society on earth - a great and heavy responsibility. Moreover, in the context of British India, where foreign power had colonised much public space, this was a burden of which Muslim women were asked to take a particularly heavy share.

In the scholarship devoted to the Christian West the shift from other-worldly to this-worldly religion, which brought man to stand before the unfettered sovereignty of God, is regarded as a development of momentous importance. Among its many outcomes was helping to shape the modern Western senses of the self, of identity. There is an assumption here, of course, which is that the 'self' is historically defined, that is that the late Roman self might be differently constituted as compared with the twentieth-century Western self. Let us consider some of the shaping processes at work. The new willed religion, which man entered into only of his choice, gave him a sense of his instrumentality in the world, of his capacity to shape it. The new and heavy weight of this responsibility to an all-powerful God led to what has been termed the 'inward turn' - this started with the emergence of spiritual diaries in the Reformation and has continued with an ever deeper exploration of the psyche. Then, this new sense of human instrumentality, aligned to a deepening sense of self, helped to foster senses of individual personal autonomy. All this tended to affirm the worth of ordinary life, the value of ordinary human experience. There was

value in productive work, in marriage, family life, love, sex; there was growing distress at human suffering and a growing sense that good consisted of human activities for the benefit of human welfare. (1)

It is not suggested for one moment that we can look at the impact of the shift to this-worldly religion and somehow read off a series of developments or potential developments amongst South Asian Muslims. Nothing could be so crass. The particular circumstances of nineteenth- and twentieth-century India, not to mention the ideas and values inculcated by Islam, are different from those of Reformation Europe. Nevertheless, what is worth doing is noting the significance of the shift from other-worldly to this-worldly religion for shaping modern senses of the self in the West. And this should prompt us at least to consider the extent to which a similar change might have helped to shape Muslim senses of the self in South Asia.

Before embarking on this exercise, there are other factors contributing to the shaping of the self which need to be acknowledged. There is the growing influence of Western civilisation with its ideas of individualism, personal fulfilment, and the rights of man - with its endorsement of earthly existence and earthly pleasures, and its celebration of individual lives, great and small. Such ideas and values were instinct in much Western literature and in many institutions; they were, of course, embodied by many of the colonial British. There is also growing exposure to other forces which helped to fashion the more autonomous self: there is the spread of capitalist modes of production with their capacity to break down

old communal loyalties and empower individuals; there is the emergence of the modern state with its concern to reach down through the thickets of the social order to make contact with each individual; there are the changes in the technology of communication - I think particularly of print and the shift it helped to bring from orality to literacy - which enabled individuals to command knowledge as never before and assisted them in the process of exploring their inner selves.(2)

There are, of course, many forces at work in shaping the changing Muslim senses of the self. Our concern is to suggest that the shift from other-worldly to this-worldly religion is worthy of exploration.

Before embarking on our exploration it is necessary to outline the nature and impact of the shift to this-worldly Islam. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries in South Asia saw a growing attack on intercessionary sufism, indeed, at times on all forms of sufism itself. The reformists were determined to rid the world of its enchanted places, that is of anything that might diminish the believers' sense of responsibility. They were determined to assert the principle of tawhid, that is of the oneness of God. This theme ran through all the movements of the age from the Mujahidin of Saiyid Ahmad of Rai Bareli to the Jamaati Islami of Maulana Maududi. Not all movements gave quite the same emphasis to this theme. If the Ahl-i Hadiths and Ahl-i Quran were opposed to all forms of institutionalised sufism, the Deobandis on the other hand confined themselves to attacking

practices at saints' shrines which presupposed the capacity of the saint to intercede for man with God. There were ironies, too. Maududi, while abhorring the tendency of sufism to compromise the oneness of God, nevertheless found an excellent organisational model in the sufi order which he used for his Jamaat. (His vision of the role of the Amir of the Jamaat was similar to that of the sufi master to whom all his disciples gave unquestioning submission). This said, we should be aware that there was enormous sensitivity to behaviour at saints' shrines amongst almost all Muslims. It affected non-reformers as well as reformers. It was an important concern for the ulama of the Firangi Mahal family of Lucknow. The research of Claudia Liebeskind on three Awadhi shrines in this period, moreover, has illustrated how behaviour at them changed in order to accommodate some reformist preferences at least.(3) What we need to be aware of is that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries increasing numbers of India's Muslims from the upper and middle classes were finding the credibility of the friends of God, who had long provided them with comfort, undermined. There could be no intercession for them. They were directly answerable to the Lord, and to Him alone.(4)

There can be no doubt that Reformist Muslims felt the weight of this new responsibility and were meant to feel it. They knew that it was their choice to will the good and forbid the evil. It was their choice as to whether a Muslim society which followed God's wishes existed on earth or not. Moreover, they knew that they were answerable to Him for their actions. Husain Ahmad Madani, principal of Deoband in the mid-twentieth century, often

wept at the thought of his shortcomings.(5) Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, one of the founders of the school, when reading the Quran alone at night, would weep and shake and appear terrified at those chapters dealing with God' wrath.(6) The Reformist God was certainly compassionate and merciful, as God always had been, but he was also to be feared. Indeed, 'Fear God' was the very first practice sentence that women in the reformist tradition, who were learning how to read, had to confront.(7) There was a constant sense of guilt that the believer was not doing enough to meet the high standards of this most demanding God. 'Oh God! What am I to do? I am good for nothing', Maulana Muhammad Ilyas, the founder of the Tablighi Jamaat, would exclaim as he paced at night. And when his wife told him to come to bed, he said that if she knew what he knew she would be doing the same. 'I find no comparison between my anxiety, my effort and my voice,' he wrote, 'and the responsibility of Tabligh God has placed upon my shoulders. If He shows mercy, He is forgiving, merciful, and if He does justice, there is no escape for me from the consequences of my guilt.'(8)

Nothing brings home more the weight of responsibility with which Reformist Muslims were faced than their visions of Judgement. Consider the picture in Ashraf Ali Thanvi's Bihishti Zewar, which has been so ably translated and introduced for us by Barbara Metcalf. Thanvi draws on a vision initially generated by Shah Rafi al-Din, one of the four sons of Shah Wali Allah, and therefore at the heart of the Reformist tradition. Bihishti Zewar is one of the most influential books of twentieth century Muslim South Asia.

The believer is first of all reminded of the Prophet's emotion at the thought of heaven and hell. `He wept greatly until his blessed beard was wet with tears. Then he declared: "I swear by that Being in whose power is my life that if you know what I know about the afterlife, you would flee to the wilderness and place dust upon your head."'

Then the believer is told the signs of the coming of Judgement. The proper order of the shari`a will be reversed; people will think the wealth owed to God is their property: they will seek knowledge of religion not for its own sake but for worldly gain etc... The natural order will be reversed: stones will rain down from the sky; people will turn into pigs and dogs. The Imam Mahdi will appear to lead the Muslims into battle against the Nazarenes. The one-eyed Dajjal will appear claiming to be the Messiah. Hasrat Isa will descend from the sky with his hands on the shoulders of two angels to kill the Dajjal. The sun will rise in the West. A balmy breeze from the South will produce a fatal growth in the armpits of the believers. Then, on a Friday, the tenth Muharram, in the morning when all people are engaged in their respective work, a trumpet will suddenly be sounded. At first, it will be very, very soft. Then it will grow so much louder that all will die from terror. The heaven and earth will be rent. The world will be extinguished.

Then comes the Day of Judgement. After forty years God will order the trumpet to be blown again. Heaven and earth will again be established. The dead will emerge alive from their graves and will be gathered on the Plain of Judgement. The sun will be very close, and peoples' very brains will begin to cook in its heat.

People will sweat in proportion to their sins. Only the Prophet Muhammad's intercession will persuade Almighty God to intervene. Angels in great number will descend from the heavens and surround everyone on every side. The throne of Almighty God, on which will be the Illumination of Almighty God, will descend. The accounting will begin, and the Book of Deeds will be opened. Of their own accord, the believers will come on the right hand and the unbelievers on the left. The scales for weighing deeds will be set up, and from it everyone's good and bad deeds will be known. Thereupon everyone will be ordered to cross the Bridge of the Way. Anyone whose good deeds weigh more in the balance will cross the bridge and enter into paradise. Anyone whose sins weigh more, unless forgiven by God, will fall into hell. ... When all the inhabitants of heaven and hell are settled in their places, Almighty God will bring forth Death in the shape of a Ram, in between heaven and hell. He will display Death to everyone and have it slaughtered. He will declare: "Now death will come neither to the dwellers in heaven nor to the dwellers in hell. All must dwell for ever in their respective places." There will be no end to the rejoicing of the inhabitants of heaven and no end to the anguish and grief of the inhabitants of hell.' (9)

The awfulness of this eschatological vision, the powerlessness of the believer to achieve salvation except through the preponderance of his good deeds on earth, gives real insight into how individual senses of responsibility were likely to be deepened. The penetration of this sense into the individual's inner self, its approach towards the quiddity of the human being, helps to explain the high levels of emotion it generated. It also

helps to explain the growth of sectarianism - the many Muslim groups fashioned in nineteenth- and twentieth-century India that exist to this day - as Muslims in different social and intellectual locations strove with great sincerity to find the right way towards salvation. It helps to explain the world of manazaras, fatwa wars and high combatitiveness that typifies these groups. This was the price to be paid for the huge release of religious energy generated by what could be called a process of personal religious empowerment.

This sense of responsibility was not just felt amongst ulama of the reformist tradition, and those who followed them, it was felt no less by Muslim modernists, those who wished to build bridges between Western science and Islamic understandings. Listen to that very great man Saiyid Ahmad Khan:

But since I have been the pioneer of Modern Education which, as I have said, is to some extent opposed to Islam, I regard it as my duty to do all I can, right or wrong, to defend my religion and show the people, the true, shining countenance of Islam. This is what my conscience dictates and, unless I do its bidding, I am a sinner before God. (10)

A similar spirit illuminated those other great modernists, Muhammad Iqbal and Fazlur Rahman, in their endeavours to show the people the shining countenance of Islam.

We should also note that this sense of responsibility has come to be spread more and more widely through the Muslim society of South Asia as the reforming movement has continued to develop, and as it has come to interact with a society where books were more widely available, and literacy slowly but surely growing. It is one of the ironies of this process that much of this activity was set going by ulama who, by translating key works of

the Islamic tradition into Indian languages and by printing them largescale, aimed to give Muslim society strength to cope with colonial rule, but in the process they helped to destroy their own monopoly over religious knowledge. If in the nineteenth century the effort was concentrated on a literate elite, the aristocracy which was attracted to the Ahl-i Hadiths and the Ahl-i Quran, the sharif classes which tended to go to Aligarh and the lesser bourgeois of the qasbas which tended to go to Deoband, in the twentieth century the effort was taken more widely into society, in part through the publications of the Jamaati Islami, which, though elitist itself, spoke to a whole new generation of Western-educated Muslims, but for the most part through the Tablighi Jamaat, or Preaching Society, which aimed, and aims, to involve ordinary Muslims in taking a basic understanding of reformist Islam to the masses. The loss of the ulama's monopoly, this process implied, was a necessary sacrifice in striving to deepen the sense of personal responsibility in society as a whole. This democratisation of the possession of religious knowledge and its interpretation, which went hand in hand with the emergence of the concept of the caliphate or vice-regency of man in Muslim thought, is a development of enormous potential and importance for the future of Muslim societies.(11)

There is one final point which needs to be made about the shift towards this-worldly religion and the spread of a new sense of responsibility: it seems to have fallen rather more heavily on women than on men. It is now a commonplace of the literature devoted to gender and identity in South Asia since 1800 that with non-Muslim occupancy of public space women move from their

earlier position of being threats to the proper conduct of Muslim society to being the mistresses of private Islamic space, the central transmitters of Islamic values, the symbols of Muslim identity, the guardians of millions of domestic Islamic shrines. Women come, in fact, to bear an awesome responsibility. Thus they had a central role to play in the reformist project. Their education, to the extent, as Ashraf Ali Thanvi declared, of acquiring the learning of a maulvi, was crucial to waging war on all those customs which threatened the unity of God and to maintaining fully in place the power of Muslim conscience in fashioning Islamic society. Thanvi also admitted that women would have to struggle harder than men to achieve this outcome. (12)

For Maududi and the Islamists women are expected to acquire knowledge of Islam, just as men do, and to examine the consciences in the same way. On the other hand, they were biologically and psychologically different from men and their place was in purdah and in the home. They were to be the rulers of domestic space, sealed off from all those elements of kufr which polluted public space. 'The harim', he declared, 'is the strongest fortress of Islamic civilization, which was built for the reasons that, if it [that civilization] ever suffered a reverse, it [that civilization] may then take refuge in it.' (13) Muslim modernists sent out conflicting messages, on the one hand emphasising the spiritual and moral superiority of women, which might militate against their education, while on the other increasingly coming to see their education in Western learning and through the medium of English as the measure of the health

and development of society. Wherever women found themselves, a heavy weight of responsibility rested upon them.

This weight is borne down to the present, although the extra burden of political pressures have come to join those of patriarchy and willed religion. Much of the discourse, both about Pakistani identity and about Muslim identity in India, has come to take place around the position and behaviour of women. If there is a correlation between burdens of responsibility and growing senses of the self, there is room for there to be increasingly stressful tension between women's expectations and those of the wider society in which they move.

We now move from the shift towards this-worldly Islam and the new sense of responsibility it fosters to the impact of this responsibility on Muslim senses of the self. There are four themes which should be noted. They are: self instrumentality, the idea of the individual human being as the active, creative agent on earth; self-affirmation, the autonomy of the individual; to which is connected the affirmation of the ordinary things of the self, the affirmation of ordinary life; and finally, the emphasis on self-consciousness, the reflective self, which in the Western experience is referred to as the 'inward turn'.

1. Self-Instrumentality

The first outcome of responsibility was that each individual Muslim had to take action to achieve salvation. The theme of individual instrumentality in this world runs through all the manifestations of this-worldly Islam. The life of Saiyid Ahmad Khan was a testament to his belief in self-help, and the need for

the individual to take action for the good of his community and of Islam. Ashraf Ali Thanvi, in considering the process of character formation, insists that knowledge of what one should do is itself not enough: 'knowledge is not true knowledge unless it is acted upon', only thus is the inner self shaped.(14) For his contemporary, Muhammad Ilyas, Tabligh was the concrete manifestation of 'knowing meaning doing' in the light of the Quran's exhortation to Muslims both to acquire and to transmit knowledge.(15) Maududi makes perfectly clear the duty of Muslims to act on their knowledge of God's commandments if they wish to be saved. This world is the ground on which men prepare for the next. But the clearest statement and vision of man's instrumentality comes in the thought of Iqbal who makes the role of the human self, or ego, in the creative activity of shaping and reshaping the world the focus of much of his work. For him the reality of the individual is demonstrated not just in thought but in action in this world - not 'cogito ergo sum' but 'ago ergo sum'. 'The final act', he declares in his Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, 'is not an intellectual act, but a vital act which deepens the whole being of the ego and sharpens his will with the creative assurance that the world is not just something to be seen and known through concepts, but to be made and remade by continuous action.'(16) Man must not only act but he was the prime mover in God's creation. The new Muslim self is a doing self. Hence the bursts of creative energy released by Indian Muslims during the past two centuries.

2. Self Affirmation

Individuals who will their religion on the basis of their

own knowledge have the capacity to be increasingly autonomous and self-affirmative. They make their own choices. Ashraf Ali Thanvi, for instance, aims to give this capacity to women by giving them the learning of a maulvi and much practical knowledge as well. Iqbal's moral and religious ideal is of the man who achieves self affirmation by being more and more individual and more and more unique. In both cases unrestrained individualism is constrained by the godly purposes these authors have in mind for their subjects. There is, however, an essential tension between this-worldly Islam's desire to empower humankind on earth and on the other hand to continue to focus their attention on godly ends. Once the genie of individualism has been let out of the bottle, there is no guarantee that it will continue to submit to Islam.

3. Affirmation of ordinary life

With the affirmation of self there also comes the affirmation of the ordinary things of the self, the ordinary things of daily life, which the philosopher, Charles Taylor, terms 'one of the most powerful ideas in modern civilization'.⁽¹⁷⁾ We can see this process at work in the new trends which emerge in the sirat literature, that is in the biographies of the Prophet, whose number increase greatly in the twentieth century. Increasingly Muhammad is depicted not as the 'Perfect Man' of the sufi tradition but as the perfect person. He is said to have been 'beloved, charitable, frugal, generous, gentle, honest, lenient, a lover of children, modest, pure, steadfast and successful'. Less attention, as Cantwell Smith has pointed out, is given to his intelligence, political sagacity and

capacity to harness the new social forces in his society and more to his qualities as a good middle class family man - his sense of duty and his loving nature - and his qualities as a good citizen - his consideration for others and in particular those who are less fortunate.(18) This transition is also mirrored in changes which take place in biographical writing more generally; the concern is less with what the individual might have contributed to Islamic civilisation and the transmission of knowledge and more on his life in his time and his human qualities. Even in the writings of the ulama it is possible to see them responding to the humanistic preferences of their times and depicting much more rounded lives to support their didactic purpose.(19) Another dimension of this process is the growing discussion of family and domestic issues, and particularly women, in public space. This discourse is begun by men such as Nazir Ahmad, Hali and Mumtaz Ali in the nineteenth century but in the twentieth century it is increasingly taken up by women and not least by the tens of women who aired their views in the pages of those remarkable journals Ismat and Tehzib un Niswan. All matters are discussed in public from education, diet and dress to love marriages, divorce and the sources of women's inferiority. The writing is often assertive in style, demanding that women and their lives be given respect.(20) Finally, the rise of the short story and the novel is, of course, an indication of the new value given to understanding human character and the many ways of being human. The themes, often shocking in their day, which were taken up by leading practitioners such as Manto and Ismat Chughtai - family life, relationships, feelings, sex - indicate the new arenas of life in

which Muslims are finding meaning. Such is the new importance of these profoundly human matters that religious thinkers cannot afford to ignore them. 'The Islamic pattern of inner life,' declares the religious philosopher Syed Vahiduddin, 'finds expression in religious and moral acts, in prayer, in love, in forgiveness, in seemingly mundane activities such as sex and domestic life, which should be radiated by the glow of the world beyond...'. (21)

4. The inward turn; the growth of self-consciousness and reflection

The final theme is the growth of self-consciousness and reflective habit. A major element of this-worldly Islam in almost all its forms is the requirement for self-examination - a willed Islam had to be a self-conscious one, Muslims had to ask themselves regularly whether they had done all in their power to submit to God and carry out His will in the world. In book Seven of Bihishti Zewar Ashraf Ali Thanvi has a rather charming way of illustrating the process of regular self-examination to ensure purity of intentions and avoidance of wrongdoing. He suggests to the believer that she set aside a little time in the morning and in the evening to speak to her lower self [nafs] as follows:

O Self, you must recognize that in this world you are like a trader, Your stock-in-trade is your life. Its profit is to acquire well-being forever, that is, salvation in the afterlife. This is indeed a profit! If you waste your life and do not gain your salvation, you suffer losses that reach to your stock-in-trade. That stock-in-trade is so precious that each hour - indeed, each breath - is valuable beyond limit.

O Self, recognize God's kindness that Death has not yet come.

O Self, do not fall into the deception that Almighty God will surely forgive you. [Don't bank on his mercy]

Say to yourself, "O Self, you are like a sick person. A sick person must follow good regimen. Sinning is a bad regimen...

Say to the Self, "O Self, the world is a place of journeying, and on a journey complete comfort is never available. You must endure all kinds of trouble. Travelers put up with these troubles because they know that when they reach home they will have all comfort .. In the same way, you must endure hard work and distress as long as you dwell in this world. There is work in acts of worship; there is distress in giving up sin; there are all kinds of other troubles. The afterlife is our home. When we arrive there, all trouble will be ended.(22)

This theme of self-consciousness and self-examination is to be found in many religious thinkers of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whether we look at Muhammad Ilyas, Maududi and Vahiduddin or Saiyid Ahmad Khan and Iqbal. In seventeenth-century Europe, as we have noted, this process was accompanied by the emergence of the spiritual diary.(23) Some similar, although not directly comparable materials exist for twentieth-century Muslim India. There is, for instance, Maulana Mahomed Ali's semi-spiritual My Life: A Fragment, which was written while he was interned in World War One. There is also Dr. Syed Mahmud's record of his spiritual reflections while in jail after the non-cooperation movement.(24) Beyond such works there is a great deal of correspondence with sufis which often does contain processes of self-examination. With such evidence for the reflective habit, alongside the widespread exhortation to examine the self, it is arguable that the development of this-worldly religion helped to open up an interior landscape. Whereas in the past the reflective believer, the mystic, might have meditated upon the signs of God, the new type of reflective believer meditated increasingly on the self and the shortcomings of the self. Now

the inner landscape became a crucial site where the battle of the pious for the good took place. Doubtless, there had been Muslims in the past - in particular times and in particular contexts - for whom this had been so. The importance of the shift towards this-worldly Islam, however, was that self-consciousness and self-examination were encouraged to become widespread.

The role of reformism in helping to throw open a window on the inner landscape does not end with the end of belief. Once the original purpose has been lost the window may still remain open for purely secular purposes. The exploration of the inner territory may equally be the quest of one who is purely Muslim by culture. How far the exploration may be a consequence of early religious upbringing, or of values in society widely shared, or of exposure to Western culture will always be hard to judge, even on a case by case basis. That the process of exploration was taking place is evident in books as varied as Ismat Chughtai's remarkable novel of psychological insight Terhi Lakir (The Crooked Line) published in 1944 through to K.A. Abbas's I am not an Island: an Experiment in Autobiography published in 1977.(25)

Arguably the shift towards this-worldly Islam has emphasised new strands in Muslim selves. There is the sense of empowerment that comes with the knowledge that it is humanity that fashions the world. There is the sense of personal autonomy and individual possibility that comes with the knowledge that the individual makes choices. There is the transfer of the symbols and centres of meaning in life from the signs of God and the friends of God to the mundane things of ordinary life. And there is the development of that extra dimension to the self, the interior

space. Arguably the individual has become more complex and the possibilities for human fulfilment have become greater.

We have noted the central role of the human self for the thinkers of this-worldly Islam. The fashioning of a new human self was the central activity of the reformist project. The unlimited capacity of man to create and shape the external world is a central feature of Iqbal's thought exemplified in this challenge he makes man hurl at God:

You created the night - I lit the lamp.
 You created the clay - I moulded the cup.
 You made the wilderness, mountains and forests
 I cultivated the flowerbeds, parks and gardens. (26)

We should note, too, that these manifestations of this-worldly Islam empower man but do not give him unlimited freedom. His power is in the service of God's word (Thanvi). His power is to be within the limits set by Him (Maududi). His power, his human potential, can only be fully realised within the framework of the community created by Him (Iqbal).

There remain a few reflections. First, there is an essential tension between the forces of individualism, potential and actual, set loose by this-worldly religion, and the continuity of the Muslim community as the community of all Muslims. We have noted that a central feature of this-worldly Islam is the empowerment of individuals, indeed the requirement placed on individuals to act on earth. What makes sure, for most Muslim thinkers, that these actions are designed to promote Islamic ends is fear of Judgement and faith, or just faith. But, willed Islam would appear to be a two-edged sword. It can release great religious energy and creativity, as it has done in South Asia and

elsewhere. But, on the other hand, it opens the door to unbelief. Muslims, who can choose to believe, can also choose not to believe, and become Muslims merely by culture. Once belief goes those mundane areas of life which reformist Muslims cherish in the name of God - work, home, family, relationships, sex - now could become prime theatres of meaning in themselves. With the shift towards this-worldly Islam, and the increasing disenchantment of the world, I wonder, has Islam turned onto a track that, as in the West, leads down a secularising path? Certainly, here is a package of ideas ready to be powered forward in society by the growth of capitalism and the individual freedoms the modern state can fashion.

Secondly, we have noted how the responsibilities for this-worldly Islam came to bear with especial weight on women. I am not equipped to assess the outcomes of this especial burden, although it seems a subject worthy of investigation. Nevertheless, there is no doubting the tension which exists between ideas of family and community on the one hand and individualism on the other. 'There was a sense of a collective in the lifestyle of this house', declares Gaythi, the heroine of Altaf Fatima's Dastak Na Do [The One who did not ask], 'the selfish god of individualism had not yet crossed its threshold.' (27) And I wonder if the strident tone of many of the contributions to Ismat and Tehzib un Niswan in the 1940s was a reflection of the pressure that women were expected to endure. And I wonder, too, if this might not explain the desire of some to test the boundaries of what was acceptable. I think of the erotic novels of Rashid Jahan, of the treatment of sex by Ismat

Chughtai which led to her being put on trial in the 1940s, or more recently of Taslima Nasreen's stubborn jousting at the boundaries of the permissible.

Thirdly, willed Islam, self-conscious Islam, leads to a powerful concern to assert and to police the boundaries of difference; it surely also leads to a deepening of community affiliation in the psyche. By the same token, it may also form part of the groundwork for the development of a Muslim political identity and responsiveness to Islamic symbols in politics. This said, we should note that leaders of this-worldly Islam have gone in very different directions in the political sphere from Muhammad Ilyas and Abul Hasan Nadvi, who have insisted that Islam is all about fashioning individuals and has nothing to do with the political sphere, to Maulana Maududi, who insisted that mastery of the political sphere is essential to achieve right guidance for society.(28)

More thought needs to be given to the implications of the deep cultural transformation brought about by the shift in Muslim piety firmly towards this-worldly religion. It is important to get a stronger grasp on its role in shaping modern Muslim selves. Among other things it would be useful to have a sense of its contribution, as compared with global processes, to fashioning the greater individualism of some twentieth-century Muslim selves. But we also need a sense of how it may be leading to abrasive interactions between the search for individual fulfilment and the obligations of community, an abrasiveness often felt most particularly by women.(29) Doubtless, as the different paths trodden by Nadvi and Maududi suggest, those

travelling down the high road of this-worldly Islam can branch off in different directions. Among them may be that of a well-developed ethical self and a largely private faith.

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9. Metcalf, Perfecting Women, pp. 222-30.
 10. Speech of Saiyid Ahmad Khan quoted in Altaf Husain Hali, trans. K.H. Qadiri and David J. Matthews, (New Delhi, 1979) p. 172.
 11. For these developments see Robinson 'Islam and the Impact of Print, Barbara D. Metcalf, 'Meandering Madrasas: Knowledge and Short-term Itinerancy in the Tablighi Jama'at' in Crook ed., Transmission, pp. 49-61, and Christian W. Troll, 'Five Letters of Maulana Ilyas (1885-1944), the Founder of the Tablighi Jama'at, translated, annotated, and introduced' in C.W. Troll ed., Islam in India: Studies and Commentaries 2: Religion and Religious Education (Delhi, 1985), pp. 138-76.
 12. Metcalf, Perfecting Women, pp. 1-38.
 13. Cited in Faisal Fatehali Devji, 'Gender and the Politics of Space: the movement for women's reform, 1857-1900' in Z. Hasan ed., Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and the State (New Delhi, 1994), pp. 35-6. The whole point is summed up in a classic text: Abul A'la Maududi, Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam (New Delhi, 1974).
 14. Metcalf, Perfecting Women, p. 107.
 15. Troll, 'Five Letters' p. 143.
 16. M. Iqbal The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam (Lahore, 1954), p. 198.
 17. Taylor, Sources, p. 14.
 18. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Modern Islam in India: A Social Analysis (London, 1946), pp. 64-7.

19. Robinson, 'Islam and the impact of print', n. 80, pp. 96-7.
20. See, Gail Minault, Secluded Scholars (OUP, New Delhi, forthcoming) and Azra Asghar Ali, 'The Emergence of Feminism Among Indian Muslim Women, 1920-47' (PhD, London, 1996), especially, pp. 319-81.
21. Christian W. Troll, ed., Islam in India: Studies and Commentaries, 3: The Islamic Experience in Contemporary Thought (New Delhi, 1986), p. 153.
22. Metcalf, Perfecting Women, pp. 235-36.
23. See, for instance, Tom Webster, 'Writing to Redundancy: Approaches to Spiritual Journals and Early Modern Spirituality', The Historical Journal, 31, 1 (1996), pp. 35-56. But, it remains important to realise that the rise of self-consciousness was not restricted to one time or one culture. Peter Burke, 'Representations of the Self from Petrarch to Descartes' in Roy Porter ed., Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present (London, 1997), pp. 17-28.
24. Mohamed Ali, Afzal Iqbal ed., My Life: A Fragment: An Autobiographical Sketch (Lahore, 1942). Syed Mahmud's spiritual reflections may be found in the Firangi Mahal Papers, Karachi.
25. Abbas's father was known for his strict reforming principles, K.A. Abbas, I Am Not An Island: An Experiment in Autobiography (New Delhi, 1974), p. 35 and K.H. Ansari, The Emergence of Socialist Thought Among North Indian Muslims (1917-1947) (Lahore, 1990), pp. 288-89. Ismat Chughtai's background was notably liberal but in her early

religious background she was exposed to a strict maulvi,
ibid., pp. 316-17.

26. Translation of part of Iqbal's poem 'God's Talk with Man' in
 N.P. Ankiyev 'The Doctrine of Personality', H. Malik ed.,
Iqbal: Poet-Philosopher of Pakistan (New York, 1971), p. 274.
27. Altaf Fatima, Ruksana Ahmad trans., The one who did not ask
 (London, 1993), pp. 62-4.
28. The point is well made in Ahmed Mukarram 'Some Aspects of
 Contemporary Islamic Thought: Guidance and Governance in the
 World of Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi and Mawlana Abul Aala
 Mawdudi' (DPhil, Oxford, 1993).
29. Precisely the kind of study to elucidate this issue, even
 though it is on a Hindu rather than a Muslim community, has
 recently been completed by Mines in the context of Madras
 city. Mattison Mines, Public Faces, Private Voices: Community
 and Individuality in South India (Berkeley, 1994).